Towards a Theory of Hungarian Verbal Particles: a Case Study of *El-*

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This paper investigates the base-position of verbal particles in Hungarian. I focus on the particle *el-* 'away' and show that it has different meaning contributions to the predication when combined with different types of verbs. I argue that despite the three seemingly unrelated meanings of *el-*, two uses involve the same lexical item. In these unifiable cases I analyze *el-* as a measure function that can measure in both the spatial and the temporal domains.

1. Introduction

1.1 Basic facts about verbal particles in Hungarian

Verbal particles (or *particles* for short, also often called *preverbs*) in Hungarian belong to the class of verbal modifiers and have a similar function to particles in English and other Germanic languages and verbal prefixes in the Slavic languages. An example is given in (1).

(1) *János* fel*nézett* *az égre*.[1]
John.NOM PRT(upwards)-look-PAST.2SG the sky-to
'John looked up to the sky.'

The particle and the verb form a complex predicate. The argument structure of this complex predicate is often different from that of the verb in itself:

(2) a *Úsztam* *(20 km-t).*
swim-PAST-1SG 20 km-ACC
'I swam (20 kms).'

b Le*úsztam* *(20 km-t).*
PRT(downwards)-swim-PAST-1SG 20 km-ACC
'I swam 20 kms.'

In sentences without negation or structural focus, the verbal particle directly precedes the verb. (3) and (4) are sharply ungrammatical, but can easily be repaired by removing the adverb (3) or the topic (4) from between the particle and the verb (and placing them, for instance, to the front of the clause).

(3) Fel *(*gyakran) *néztem* *az égre*.
PRT(upwards) often look-PAST-1SG the sky-to
'I have often looked up to the sky.'

(4) *Fel *Péter* *nézett* *az égre*.
PRT(upwards) Peter.NOM look-PAST.3SG the sky-to
'Peter looked up to the sky.'

In sentences containing negation or structural focus, it is the negation marker *nem* 'not' or the focussed constituent that precedes the verb. In these cases the particle surfaces postverbally.

[1] I gloss particles as PRT and specify their directional meaning in brackets even when they do not contribute any meaning of directionality, cf. §1.2.

(5) *János nem nézett* fel *az égre.*
John.NOM not look-PAST.3SG PRT(upwards) the sky-to
'John didn't look up to the sky.'

(6) *JÁNOS nézett* fel *az égre.*
John.NOM look-PAST.3SG PRT(upwards) the sky-to
'It was John that looked up to the sky.'

1.2 The problem

This paper focuses on the base-position of verbal particles. I investigate a so far neglected feature of particles, namely that the same particle has different meaning contributions to the predication when combined with different verbs. Some particles (eg. *meg* 'perf.') always express resultativity (7). My focus of interest is another group: the directionals (such as *el-* 'away'). These particles can combine with a motion verb, and when they do so, they express a direction (8). Crucially, directional particles can also combine with activity verbs not expressing motion. In this case they have a resultative meaning (9).

(7) *Mari* meg*ette* *a tortát.*
Mary.NOM PRT(perf)-eat-PAST.3SG the cake-ACC
'Mary ate the cake (all of it).'

(8) *Mari* el*ment* *(a boltba).*
Mary.NOM PRT(away)-go-PAST.3SG the shop-ILLAT
'Mary went away (to the shop).'

(9) *Mari* el*olvasta* *a regényt.*
Mary.NOM PRT(away)-read-PAST.3SG the novel-ACC
'Mary has read the novel.'

The obvious question arises: do we have the same lexical item in (8) and (9), or is this a case of accidental homonymy?

Some particles have a further type of use, too, in which they provide information on how the event progresses and do not change the argument structure of the verb. This makes them similar to the Slavic superlexical prefixes. *El-* (away), already seen in (8) and (9), is such a particle: *el*Verb can also mean 'spend some time Verb-ing'.

(10) *Mari* el*iddogált.*
Mary.NOM PRT(away)-have.drinks-PAST.3SG
'Mary lingered over a drink or two.'

The question here, of course, is wheter the third type of use involves a different lexical item from *el-* in (8) and (9), or can it be unified with either (or better, both) of them.

The paper is structured as follows. In Section 2, I introduce the framework I use for the analysis: Ramchand (2008)'s First Phase Syntax for the structure of verbs and Svenonius (to appear)'s decomposition of PPs. In Section 3, I review some previous studies and show the problems they raise. In Section 4, I present an analysis in which the three readings of *el-* correlate with three different merge-in sites in the structure, and in which the first and third uses involve the same lexical item. Section 5 sums up the findings.

2. The framework

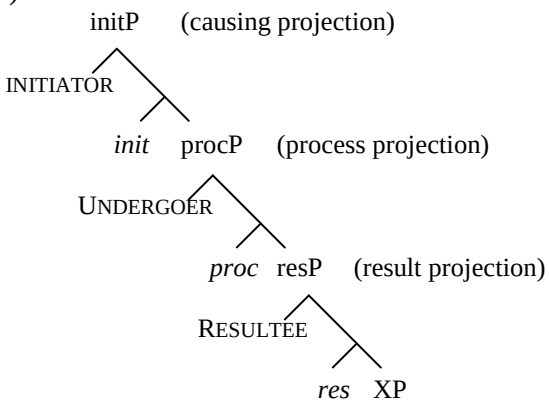
In my analysis I use the First Phase Syntax theory developed by Ramchand (2008). In First Phase Syntax, the verb is split up into 3 layers, each corresponding to a subevent of the verb. These are: *init*(*iation*)P, *proc*(*ess*)P and *res*(*ult*)P.

*Init*P identifies the causation subevent and introduces the external argument (it roughly corresponds to vP). When there is no causation subevent, as in the case of unaccusatives, there is no *init*P in the syntactic representation. *Proc*P, the only obligatory head in the extended verbal projection, identifies the process subevent (and roughly corresponds to VP). If the eventuality has a result, *proc*P takes *res*P as its complement. This lowest layer identifies the result state. *Res*P can optionally take various types of complements (eg. AP, DP or PP), with the material further describing the result state.

Verbs are specified in the lexicon as to which heads they lexicalize. *Enter*, for instance, is an *init, proc, res* verb, because it necessarily expresses a casuation, a process and a result state. *Write*, on the other hand, is only an *init*, *proc* verb, because it necessarily involves a causer and a process, but does not necessarily lead to a result.

The arguments of the verb are hosted by the specifiers of *init*P, *proc*P and *res*P. The specifier of *init*P harbours the subject of initiation. A DP occupying this position is interpreted as the INITIATOR of the event. The specifier of *proc*P is the subject of the process. A DP in this position is interpreted as the UNDERGOER of the event. Finally, the specifier of *res*P hosts the subject of the result. A DP in this specifier is interpreted as the RESULTEE (or holder of the result state).

(11)



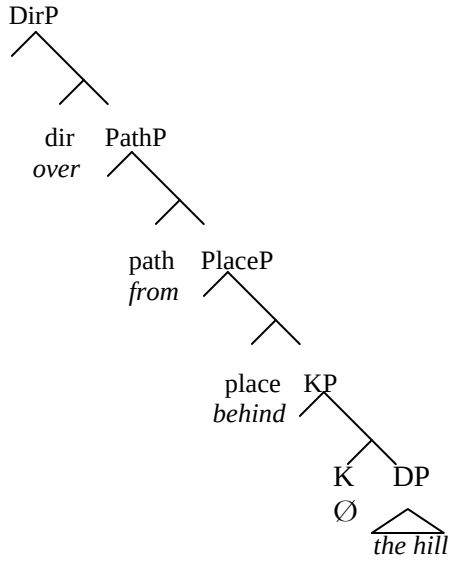
The interpretations associated with the 3 specifier positions are not mutually exclusive. For instance, *the apple* in *Mary ate the apple* has two subjecthood entailments: it is both the subject of process (UNDERGOER) and the subject of result (RESULTEE). Multiple subjecthood entailments occur when an argument moves from a lower specifier to a higher one (in this case from [spec, *res*P] to [spec, *proc*P]) and accumulates the entailments associated with each position.

Note that it is not the case that *init*P and *proc*P are just alternative names for vP and VP. First Phase Syntax is crucially different from the mainstream split-vP hypothesis in at least two ways. On the one hand, it dispenses with the Theta-criterion. Theta-roles are not assigned in a specific position (as opposed to the idea behind UTAH). It is thematic relations that are assigned in specfic positions, and Theta-roles are built compositionally out of these. On the other hand, the syntactic structure gives very explicit instructions to semantics because every position in the tree is closely tied with a specific semantic interpretation.

As regards the structure of PP, I adopt the fine-grained functional sequence laid out in Svenonius (to appear, shown here with some simplifications for expository purposes): DirectionalP > PathP > PlaceP > CaseP > DP. In this decomposition the PP in (12) has the structure in (13).

(12) *The boat drifted over from behind the hill*. (Svenonius to appear, example 36 a)

(13)



According to Ramchand (2008), *proc*P may naturally take a PathP complement with the Path further describing the process; and *res*P may take a PlaceP complement with the Place further describing the result state. Processes embedding PlaceP and results embedding PathP do not materialize because of the semantic clash involved with such combinations.

In first phase syntax telic eventualities are built in one of two ways. On the one hand, *res*P makes the event telic on its own. On the other hand, an event can be telic in the absence of *res*P, too, if *proc*P has a complement that provides a temporal bound to the event. Both options will turn out to be highly relevant for the analysis of particles.

3. Previous Studies

As far as their base-position is concerned, particles are analized as adjuncts to the verbal head (Szendrői 2001; Ackema 2004) or as AdvP complements of the verb (Alberti 2004; É. Kiss 2008). Their surface position is assumed to be either [spec, AspP] (É. Kiss 2002) or [spec, PredP] (É. Kiss 2008). Consensus seems to have developed around the type of the movement: the particle moves as a phrase.

É. Kiss (2006) analyzes the particle as a secondary predicate, predicated of the theme argument. The theory makes the prediction that predicates not having a theme argument, such as unergatives, are incompatible with particles. É. Kiss also states that all particle + verb combinations must be stored in the lexicon and makes a distinction between three types of particles: terminative (the same group that I term 'directional'), resultative and locative. In (8) and (9) we have already seen examples of terminative and resultative particles. An sentence with a locative particle is shown in (14).

(14) *A kulcs* kint *van a lábtörlő alatt.*
the key.NOM PRT(outside) be.3SG the mat.NOM under
'The key is outside under the mat.'

It is an in indisputable merit of É. Kiss's approach that it classifies particles into subgroups (most researchers treat particles as one big homogenous group). At the same time, she does not notice that the directional and resultative groups show a considerable overlap (cf. the meaning alternation in 8 and 9). The approach raises some additional problems, too. Although there are particle + verb idioms which need to be stored in the lexicon under any theory, it would be redundant to store every particle + motion verb combination, too, since in these cases the meaning contribution of the particle is predictably directionality. Also, locatives are treated on a par with the other particles, yet their distribution is different from that of directionals and resultatives. To begin with, intervention of adverbials between the particle and the verb in neutral sentences produces ungrammaticlaity with resultatives and directionals, but not with locatives.

(16) a **János* be *meztelen festette a kerítést.* resultative
John.NOM PRT(inwards) naked paint-PAST.3SG the fence-ACC
'John painted the fence completely naked.

b **János* ki *meztelen tolta a beteget.* directional
John.NOM PRT(outwards) naked wheel-PAST.3SG the patient-ACC
'John wheeled out the patient naked.'

c *János* kint *meztelen locsolja a virágokat.* locative
John.NOM PRT(outside) naked water-3SG the flower-PL- ACC
'John is outside watering flowers naked.'

Secondly, particles can co-occur with a DP/AP/PP that further specifies the direction, location or result state encoded by the particle. Unlike with directionals and resultatives, this DP/AP/PP is felicitous between the particle and the predicate with locatives.

(17) a *Be *zöldre festette a kerítést.* resultative
PRT(inwards) green-TO paint-PAST.3SG the fence- ACC
'He painted the fence green.'

b *Ki *a folyosóra tolta a beteget.* directional
PRT(outwards) the corridor-TO wheel-PAST.3SG the patient- ACC
'He wheeled the patient out to the corridor.'

c Fent *a padláson találtam egy egérfogót.* locative
PRT(up) the attic-ON find-PAST.1SG a mousetrap-ACC
'I have found a spade down in the cellar.'

In addition, resultative and terminative particles must follow the verb in the progressive, while locatives may also precede it.

(18) a *János éppen vágta* fel *a tortát amikor…* resultative
John.NOM just cut-PAST.3SG PRT(upwards) the cake-ACC when
'John was cutting up the cake when…'

b *János éppen tolta* ki *a beteget amikor...* directional
John.NOM just push-PAST.3SG PRT(outwards) the patient-ACC when
'John was wheeling out the patient when…'

c *János éppen* (kint) *locsolta* (kint) *a virágokat amikor…* locative
John.NOM just PRT(outside) water-PAST.3SG PRT(outside) the flower-PL-ACC when
'John was watering the flowers outside when…'

Finally, locatives never show the meaning alternation seen with directionals/resultatives. I take these differences between resultative and directional particle constructions on the one hand and 'locative particle constructions' on the other to indicate that locatives do not belong to the category of particles. I will treat resultatives and directionals as Ps and locatives as adverbs, and so I have little to say about locatives in the remainder of the paper.

4. Analysis

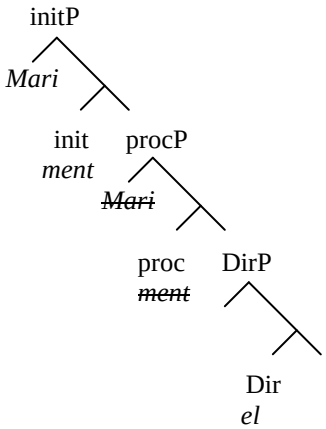
4.1 *Directionals*

When particles that have the potential to express directionality are combined with motion verbs, the result is a complex predicate in which the verb describes the manner of motion and the particle describes the direction or route of the motion. The presence of the particle also has a telicizing effect on the aspectual interpretation of the sentence. Consider (19), which is (8) without the directional PP.

(19) *Mari* el*ment*.
Mary.NOM PRT(away)-go-PAST.3SG
'Mary went away.'

My proposal is that in sentences where the interpretation of the particle is directional, *proc*P embeds DirP as its complement and the particle is in Dir^0. The first phase in (19) has the structure in (20).

(20)

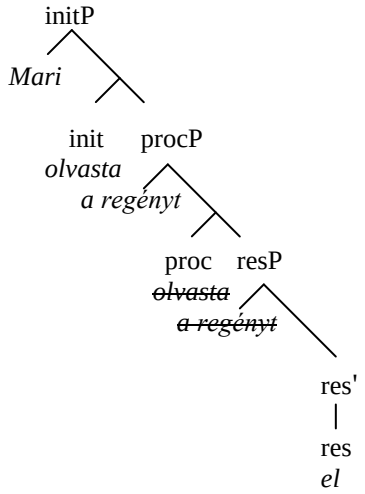


The structure does not contain resP (that is compatible only with PlaceP, not DirP), so the telicity effect must arise from the temporal bound of the event. This temporal bound is provided by the presence of the particle. A person must cover some minimal distance for the predicate 'X went away' to be true (Filip 2000). When this distance is covered, the event becomes temporally bound.

4.2 *Resultatives*

Particles that have the ability to express directionality may attach to a verb not encoding motion, too, provided the verb has an UNDERGOER argument. In the so-formed complex predicate the verb denotes the activity; but the particle does not seem to refer to anything in the real world: it merely encodes that the event is telic. I suggest that *el-* causes this alternation in telicity because here it lexicalizes res^0. The structure of the verb phrase in (9) is given as (21).

(21)



Directional and resultative particles thus make the sentence telic by employing two different strategies: directionals telicize the event by providing a temporal bound to it, while resultatives project a *res*P.

4.3 *The third group*

El- 'away' is one of those particles that have a further type of use, providing information on how the event progresses. In this use *el*-Verb means 'spend some time V-ing, at a leisurely pace or without exerting oneself'. A non-exhaustive list of predicates taking this type of *el-* is given in (22):

(22) el*álmodozik,*	el*ábrándozik,*	el*babrál,*	el*bámészkodik,*
EL-day.dream	EL-day.dream	EL-fiddle	EL-gape
'day-dream'	'day-dream'	'fiddle'	'stand gaping about'
el*beszélget,*	el*betegeskedik*	el*borozgat,*	el*dolgozgat,*
EL-talk	EL-be.sick	EL-have.wine	EL-work
'have a long conversation'	'be sick for a while'	'spend time drinking wine'	'work casually'
el*cseveg,*	el*fecseg,*	el*gondolkozik,*	el*iddogál,*
EL-talk.away	EL-chatter	EL-think	EL-have.drinks
'have a friendly conversation'	'spend one's time chatting'	'be lost in thought'	'linger some drinks'
el*játszadozik,*	el*kínlódik,*	el*mereng,*	el*piszmog,*
EL-play	EL-struggle	EL-muse	EL-potter
'play with sg'	'struggle with sg'	'muse for some time'	'potter around'
el*rágódik,*	el*szórakozik,*	el*tréfálkozik,*	el*üldögél*
EL-brood	EL-enjoy.oneself	EL-joke	EL-sit.about
'brood over sg'	'amuse oneself with sg'	'joke with sy'	'sit about for some time'

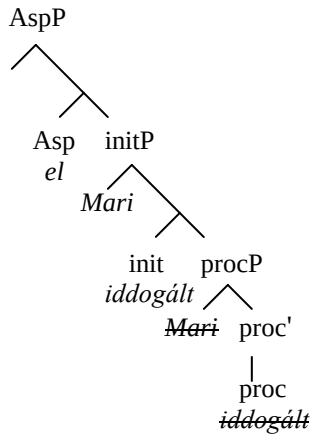
El- in these cases is importantly different from the directional and resultative uses. Directional and resultative particles contribute to the inner aspect of the event, *el-* in (22) contributes to the outer aspect of the event. In (8) and (9) it is plausible that the particle is a secondary predicate predicated of the theme arugment, but this is not the case in (10) and (22). El*dolgozgat* 'work at a leisurely pace', for instance, has a single agentive argument (and so this complex predicate is also a counterexample to É. Kiss' prediction that unergatives do not combine with

particles). In this third type of use *el-* does not change the argument structure either. Neither of these properties follow from É. Kiss‘ analysis.

In Slavic languages particles take the form of verbal prefixes and come in two groups: so-called lexical and superlexical. Lexical prefixes often change the argument structure and form idioms with the verb. Superlexical prefixes, on the other hand, don‘t change the argument structure; do not readily form idioms with the verb; and add a predictable, modifier-like meaning to the verb (Ramchand 2004; Svenonius 2004; Tolskaya 2007). The properties of superlexical prefixes seem to be the same as the properties of *el-* in the third type of use.

Ramchand and Svenonius place superlexical prefixes outside of vP. This accounts for all their properties listed above. I follow this line of thinking for *el-* in (10) and (22). Merging the particle outside *init*P guarantees that it will not change the argument structure and not form idioms with the verb. Since *el-* here encodes the outer aspect of the event, I merge it into Asp^0. The structure assigned to the relevant part of the sentence in (10) is shown in (23).

(23)



4.4 *How many* el*s?*

Looking back at the data in (8-10), is there any common meaning behind the 3 uses, or any two pairs? I suggest that the *el-* in (8) and (10) is the same lexical item. I analyze the *el-* found in these sentences as a measure function. It lexical entry is something like ‘some, satisfying an anticipated amount/extent’.

Filip (2000) argues that the Slavic prefixes *na-* and *po-* express vague extensive measure funcions, whose "value is determined by contextual factors that narrow down the sort of entities that are intended to be measured by a given prefix" (p. 59). Filip (2003) and Soucková (2004) also analyze *na-* and *po-* as measure phrases. *El-* in (8) and (10) is used in an analogous fashion to these prefixes, though it is certainly not a direct equivalent of either of them.

El- represents a measure function that can be applied to objects in both the spatial and the temporal domains. (This is not surprising, as many morphemes in language express both temporal and spatial relations (Haspelmath 1997), cf. *in* twenty minutes and *in* the house.) *El-* measures the distance from the starting point of the movement in (8) and it measures the elapsed time in (10). The meaning of a measure-function-*el* + V complex predicate is computed compositionally: the verb determines the event to which the measuring applies, the point of insertion (Dir^0 or Asp^0) determines whether the measuring takes place in the spatial or the temporal domain, and *el-* determines the size of the event (i.e. its length in space or time). There is no need to store these complex predicates in the lexicon (contra É. Kiss 2002), which is a desirable result.

As for *el-* in (9), it is not obvious how a measure-function analysis could work in this case. At this point, I have to say that there are two lexical items *el-*: one is a measure function, the other is a pure resultative particle. This is not an entirely satisfactory solution, because particles regularly show an alternation between a directional and a resultative use, and in an ultimately successful account this polysemy would follow from something deeper than chance homophony. For the present, however, I must leave the unification of *el-* in (9) with the measure-function-*el* to further research.

5. Summary

In this paper I examined the verbal particle *el-* 'away' and its various meaning contributions to the predication. I proposed that there are only two lexical items behind the three different uses of *el-*. One of these lexical items is a pure resultative particle, the other is a measure function that can serve both as a temporal and spatial measure. It needs to be pointed out that I have only scratched the surface and many issues remain to be worked out in detail.

However, I hope to have shown that the semantic contribution of the particle to the predication (i.e. the subgroup to which the particle belongs) must be taken into consideration in any thorough analysis, and that in certain cases the properties of *el-* receive a natural account only if a vP-external insertion site is assumed.

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